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## EDITORIALS

### ON "BEING ORIGINAL" AND "BEING OF YOUR EPOCH"

THAT there is a mysterious cosmic force working back of all phenomena is admitted by the greatest thinkers of the modern scientific movement—Bacon, Spencer, Huxley, Tyndall, Darwin, Crookes, Virchow, Pasteur, etc.—and that this force is volitional is being insisted upon by a growing number of scientists. At any rate this cosmic force has arranged things so that every living thing from a gnat to a nation is governed by three fundamental hungers: self-preservation, self-propagation and self-expression.

Of these three the first is the most insistent. We do want to live and we would like to endure. Man does long for immortality more than anything else. Even those atheists who pooh-pooh it are sorry they can not believe in the immortality of the soul.

Self-preservation once assured, every living thing yearns to propagate itself. Hence family life, from the lowest to the highest type.

Family life being secure, a longing for self-expression follows as a natural result in the ego of every living thing. It is therefore even as Emerson said: *All Nature is bent upon Expression.*

This it is which makes every living thing an artist—either rudimentary or full fledged. Every grasshopper through his song, every peacock through displaying his colored fan, every tree through its flowers, along with every human being is more or less of an artist—by virtue of this fundamental hunger for the self-expression of its emotions, rudimentary or advanced.

One man is more of an artist than another only because of his greater hunger for self-expression and greater skill at expressing what he feels.

Now the greater the skill and the loftier the soul of an artist, the more does he want his art to endure and the greater effort does he make to insure that endurance across the ages. And that is more true to-day than ever in history because the individual artist to-day, more than ever before, knows that only through art can he gain the lasting love of mankind and thus be immortal. And nations now feel, more than ever before, that only as their art output is great in quality and therefore enduring, will they rank high across the ages.

Hence when the American public thinks searchingly about Art, it hopes for such art as will live; and therefore it is intensely interested in grasping a knowledge of the elements of *enduring* art, above all, since the output of great art in America has not been large.

For that reason this magazine, being conducted in the interests of the public first of all, is laboring to explain to the lay public in clear, simple language, not what are the elements of trivial, dodger and ephemeral art, but what are the elements of such art as will shed luster upon the nation, because it is great.

We have hundreds of very clever artists. Hence we will never lack a full supply of clever and ephemeral art; but we will never increase our production of great art until the public knows what constitutes great art and demands it more and more.

The French motto "Man does everything by excess" is only too true. What energy we do waste in our oscillations between two extremes!

So it happens that many artists have flashes of genius coupled with splashes of stupidity. They say now and then, in a brilliant way, things that are only half true; and, carried on by the shining of their own flashes of light, they rush over the brink of common-sense and plunge into the abyss of aberrating fallacy, into which they also drag those who are not alert enough to see quickly the nonsense involved in their brilliant but excessive overstatements. Once in the abyss of error, their pride prevents them from scrambling back to common-sense, even though they may know they have gone astray. Moreover, not only are many of their statements exaggerations but they are utterly inconsistent.

"Consistency, thou art a jewel!" is a phrase of such truth and beauty that its unknown author merits a monument. A man may strenuously hold to a certain point of view and then abandon it, even denounce it. That would be an honest change of opinion. Such a change does not mean inconsistency. But a man who preaches a philosophy of life or of art based on two contradictory points of view is either silly or a charlatan. Such inconsistent overstatements have been made by Delacroix, Baudelaire, Manet, Zola, Monet, Rodin, Mallarmé, Carrière, Whistler and the latter's quondam friend Oscar Wilde. These have coined æsthetic slogans which can be proven to have been vicious half-truths.

For example: Delacroix claimed that in painting Color was more important than Drawing—a childish idea—since both are necessary to great art. Rodin said: "Nature is always beautiful!" which is not true, seeing that nature is often ugly; and Whistler, a fellow disciple with Rodin of Baudelaire said: "Nature is very rarely right, to such an extent even, that it might almost be said that Nature is usually wrong," which is also untrue, seeing that nature is generally right and beautiful, not rarely, but very often; and Oscar Wilde said "The world hates individualism" which is not true, since it hates only that selfishness which in the name of individualism leads a man to break those laws that serve as crutches and bridges to enable us to progress across ridges and chasms that lie between us and a larger freedom and a greater and more unselfish individualism. He practised selfish individualism and paid the price—in Redding Gaol!

To sift the modicum of truth in the statements launched forth by these men from the mass of untruth, in which they are encysted like flies in amber, will keep the common-sense analyst busy for fifty years, and then it will be found that these truths are not new but ancient as the sun. Let us examine two of these slogans so popular in some quarters: "Be Original!" and "Be of your epoch!"

It is amazing that the pretentious band of modernistic artists who ridicule their betters are so fatuous as to preach at one and the same time these two antagonistic catch-phrases. For they are absolutely contradictory in substance and essence, since it is utterly impossible to be of your own epoch and at the same time be original. Why?

Being original means to invent, create and depart from every known model, whether of your epoch or not, while being of one's epoch means the following of one's epoch in one way or another, and that means the imitating of either one person or many persons; and imitation is the suicide of originality. Therefore, being of one's epoch means the strangling of originality and vice-versa. What makes the case of the modernists still worse is the fact that these two slogans are fundamentally baleful and have proven a deplorable evil, not only to the world of art, but to life in general.

We say again: the wise know that the end and aim of the cosmic force is not Originality but Beauty. We have positive proof of this. First, in the demonstrable fact that the primal element of all beauty is the *curved line*, and Second, that nature abhors the straight line, even more the rectangle and the cube, avoids them when possible, and eternally seeks the curve. Throughout the infinite variety of nature's forms we see this deepest law of the universe made manifest. And the other elements of what is beautiful are now so well known that any artist seeking the truly beautiful, first and above all, need not go astray.

It is true that civilization means a departure from nature. But it means only a moderate departure, a departure only from the ruder aspects, the imperfect or the arrested types of nature. Because nature in her travail has also troubles and mishaps and, as Emerson says, "will produce a hundred crabs before giving us one perfect apple." Hence an excessive departure from nature's laws towards the ugly in our daily living, or from her perfect types in our art, means disaster to both life and art. Above all, if such excessivism is preached as the highest thing to do—in the interest of originality—the importance of which at the same time is greatly exaggerated with cunning malice to deceive the bored dilettanti of the world of art, who then in turn deceive the people too busy to think deeply on æsthetics. For it then becomes a cynical violation of the most important fiat of the cosmic volition: "Seek ye ever the beautiful and all things will be added unto you!"

Æsthetic ugliness in our environment, in our buildings and streets, in our poetry, sculpture, painting, drama, lead straight to physical and intellectual and moral ugliness, degeneracy and crime, which if not arrested will end in the *débauché* of civilization. For as Mr. Garrett said: "Art to a great extent models human nature, remember that. Know that any emotion which your

work causes will have its effect in the progeny of the next generation!" And when once we begin to condemn beauty in art and tolerate the ugly, we open up a stream of tendency which will, by easy degrees, but inevitably, land us in the morass of an utter debasement of our taste, not only in our art, but in everything in life. We can say of ugliness what Pope said of vice:

Vice is a monster of so frightful mien  
That to be hated needs but to be seen;  
Yet seen too oft, familiar with his face,  
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

The craving for Originality instead of Beauty—in violation of the laws of nature—is a modern craze. The world before 1860 never heard of it. Before that time the pursuit of the Beautiful, plus the Original, was the supreme law of art and life. But the reversal of this law dates from Baudelaire. He was a Parisian who tried to be a painter and failed and then turned to poetry and then art criticism. And he exemplified what Voltaire said: "Parisians have all the faults of the Athenians—they are even more excessive." He was a weird mixture of intellectuality and animality, of brilliancy and dullness, of sanity and insanity. He openly professed a love of Dandyism; he was an avowed charlatan—having written to Théophile Gautier: "A little charlatanism is permitted to genius; it even sits well; it is like the rouge on a pretty woman's face, a new inspiration to the mind." He was so bent on the hysterical enjoyment of every possible experience in life, however uncommon, that he finally became a victim of alcohol, a hashish fiend and a sex-pervert and died practically insane. For twenty years before his death he harped on Originality and the Artificial. Everything that was natural was to him a bore. The sublimest sunset was a bore: "Oh, these daily sunsets!" Natural hair was a bore, so he painted his green. Natural loving was a bore, so he lived with a black mistress and sang her charms. Rational living was a bore, so he resorted to every vice "to escape the boredom of the centuries!" which gradually became a feverish disease. Having a clever brain with a gift for brilliant repartee, which always captivates the shallow, and a capacity for rattling out coruscating half-truths, he sowed broadcast the seeds of this diseased craving to escape boredom, sowed it deeply in the minds of a lot of coryphées who adored flip cleverness more than solid greatness and sat at his feet assimilating his poisonous epigrams, allowing these to warp their souls and thus in turn became propagators of the vicious half-truths which he launched. These men harped on the boredom of life until there was developed a veritable cult to escape it by any and all means, no matter if they should lead to Tophet. These were all in harmony with the last stanza of Baudelaire's last poem:

O Death, old Captain Death, up anchor! ne'er be slack!  
This land disgusts us, Death! Sails to the wind we throw!  
What though like ink the sea and welkin wide and black—  
These hearts thou know'st so well with splendors are aglow.

Pour for us poisoned draughts to deaden our despairs!  
We yearn—so doth the flame of our inmost brain pursue—  
To plunge us in the gulf—or Heaven or Hell,—who cares?  
Down, down to the Unknown's pit, to grasp at last—the  
NEW.

It is true that man ever seeks to escape from the inevitable boredom of his daily run of existence. This accounts for the various wars, the coming

and going of the various "crazes" across the ages, the various extravagant fashions, the medieval mania of self-flagellation in public processions; the craze of giving away property at the end of the Tenth Century to prepare for the millennium which did not come; the "13-14-15" puzzle of forty-five years ago, when gray-haired men sat in street-cars straining to solve this puzzle; and now the craze of "futurism" in art. But we can never totally escape boredom, above all not by seeking only the new unless it is beautiful. "Lifting" beauty alone is the best antidote for the boredom in this world. Ugliness, no matter how original, inevitably leads to a deeper and more destructive boredom.

Now what do these modernists mean by originality in art, in face of the fact that every rose-leaf, every man and every work of art is inevitably original, no two being exactly alike? They mean a *striking* originality. They mean a work which will never remind us of any other work of art. But such works must ever be of extreme rarity, above all to-day. For Michelangelo five hundred years ago remarked "The human body has been drawn in every conceivable position and attitude." So that we may say that originality without commonplaceness or ugliness is impossible. And we may say with equal emphasis—there is salvation for mankind in only one kind of originality and that is Originality plus Beauty, and we may say with even more emphasis that degeneration lurks in all originality that is ugly.

The production of ugly originality in art is the work of the modernistic art party. This is proven by the fact that they chose three fallacies for the foundations of their cult when they said: "The pursuit of the beautiful is an antique fad, the artist should not seek beauty, but aim to express character in a personal (that is original) "technique." The net result of the operation of this slogan proves its adoption to have been an æsthetic aberration and a calamity. For as a result the ego-mania of the modernists became so profound that they were willing to sacrifice almost anything for a notoriety that should be profitable in money. They did this because they knew that the production of an original and ugly thing is as easy as child's play, but that the creation of a work at once original and beautiful is the most difficult thing in the world.

For example: many Ionic columns were produced before those used for the portico of the Erechtheion on the Acropolis of Athens twenty-five hundred years ago. Since then thousands of architects have tried to invent a superior Ionic column but have failed utterly. The same is true of the Doric columns of the Parthenon and of the Composite columns of the Arch of Titus at Rome. These types have never been surpassed as types and never will be. They are finished for all time. Thousands of Madonnas were made before and since Raphael's "Sistine" but none to equal that, and it is safe to predict none will ever surpass it. No existing head of the Creator has surpassed the "Jupiter Otricoli" in the Vatican; no draftsman ever surpassed Holbein and Velasquez; no colorist ever surpassed Giorgione and Titian; no composer ever surpassed Raphael; no poet ever surpassed Homer, Danté and Shakespeare; no more melodious music was ever

written than that by Palestrina, Beethoven and Verdi; no architect ever surpassed Iktinos, Bramante and Erwin von Steinbach. The variety of ornaments to be found on the Greek vases in the Vatican is so amazing as to be staggering, so that it is impossible for the human mind to invent a new ornament which is new and beautiful at the same time. Therefore, when in addition to other things we study the wonderful beauty and infinite variety of these marbles and vases, one is forced to say the *elements* of art are finished and that there is a limit to originality—when coupled with beauty.

If we do not object to ugliness, then an idiot will most likely produce the most original work of art. For there are two ways of being original—knowing everything and departing from it and knowing nothing and trying to create. Therefore, as Dr. Hyslop showed in the article given in our issue of last October, the art-works of the insane are always original and also always ugly, moreover that this affords evidence that ugliness is a breeder of insanity. This is a powerful argument for the abolishment of all ugliness instead of its production and perpetuation, as it is permitted if not actually advocated by the modernistic art party.

The modernistic movement seeks for a violent and shocking originality. But nature abhors shocks. Hence she cushions every nerve either in some fluid or fat and lubricates every channel to protect us against shocks of the body, mind and soul. Therefore Buckle was right when he said "Every new truth creates pain," and we may say that the pain is in exact ratio of the novelty of the truth. Nature produces her enduring works through evolution which does not shock, and not through shocking revolution. Your excessive originalists, smitten with the speed-mania of modern times, never has these truths burned into his soul until it is too late, because he is too feverish for quick results, in order to escape the universal doom of boredom ordained for the overimpatient ego-maniacs.

The greatest obstacle to the production of great art in this country is the noisy cry of shallow critics for more and more originality in which true beauty is ignored, who in the next breath demand that an artist "should be of his epoch." But how can a man be original if he aims to follow the conventions or style or spirit of his own epoch—seeing that every epoch began with some one, original, bold stepper-aside from the beaten track of a preceding epoch? one who was copied either consciously or unconsciously by those who surrounded and admired him and his works? We repeat, the following of the style or movement of any epoch means the copying of some one or several individuals who make up or who created that epoch and are its incarnation. Then what becomes of the artist's originality—which in the mind of these same critics is the *sine qua non* of a work of art?

The truth is, none but pettifogging artistic hucksters try to be of, or to imitate their "epoch" in art. The great artist seeks ever to rise above and to dominate his epoch, to make each and every one of his works, if possible, an epoch-making production. Instead of seeking for his audience only in a small self-worshiping clique, he stretches out the wings of his imagination and enlarges his sympathy until he sees before him and talks to every soul within the confines of his own race!

To stir the emotions of his own world, his own race, is already a passport to immortality for an artist, and many have achieved it. It is true it is almost folly to expect an artist to produce a work that will, at one and the same time, stir the emotions of a Christian in New York and a Buddhist in Japan. But if he is very great, his work may be high and deep enough to stir the emotion of all races. Then he becomes one of the Heroes of art! The number of these is few indeed.

No one has ever made a valid argument to justify the pretention that an artist *must* be of his own epoch instead of belonging to all epochs. It is only a specious thought which, shuttlecocked about for years by modernistic excessivists, has become current and appeals to the petty commercial artists who love to startle the simple laymen or confound more serious artists with a pretentious slogan.

No man can entirely escape his own epoch, any more than Münchhausen could mount to the clouds by pulling at his own bootstraps. Unconscious imitation is for us so natural—for the young, a life-necessity and for the old a constant allurements—that only by the greatest effort can a man remain true to himself. Even the greatest men cannot entirely escape the awful pressure exerted on every man by the social atmosphere of his time. Michelangelo, with all his great effort to be original, is still essentially of the Renaissance epoch—even in his most universal and greatest productions. He falls short even of the universality of Pheidias.

Therefore to preach as an artistic doctrine, as a goal in art, that which is inevitable, to preach that doctrine with insolence, to hobble an artist with it—as many modernist “mandarins” of art do—is childish, all the more when the doctrine is utterly undesirable, seeing that to think even for a moment of the style and spirit of one’s epoch tends distinctly to stifle originality. It can even be said with truth that those works which bear the stamp of some narrow epochal style of the past are, because of that very stamp, distinctly inferior to such as do not really remind us of any particular epoch. So that the greatest works of the Greeks look as though they might have been done only yesterday. Now shrieking originality is not essential to the

making of a great work of art, and one truly beautiful work, however conventional, is worth a cargo of ugly creations, however original.

But for those whose vanity makes them yearn to be original, let them not forget to remember first of all the remark of Emerson, “He is great who is what he is *from nature* and who reminds us of no other man”; and then the remark of Solomon, “He hath made all things beautiful in his time.” He who wishes to be rationally original and not simply bizarre should not strive with main strength to be original but should seek to accentuate moderately his own personality and temperament. Because every man who is sufficiently a person, who has force enough to be entitled to aim to serve the world as an artist, is by nature individual and original, and if he remains true to himself his work will be sufficiently original—above all if it is truly beautiful.

To conclude, the most beneficent thing that can be vouchsafed to a man or a people is to be lifted a little, day by day, out of the mire of animality. Originality alone can not do this. Beauty alone can do it—that is, complete beauty—physical, intellectual and spiritual. Of course, mere physical beauty without spiritual content or poetic suggestion will, as we showed in last month’s magazine, lead to destruction. But mere originality devoid of lifting beauty is far more destructive because it progressively and fatally renders our life more and more a drab, emotionless bore. And the effort which we will make to escape that boredom will fatally force us to drift into individual and national excesses. Therefore the deepest truth and most beneficent message we can lay before the American public at this time is: The production of great art is dependent, not on our seeking to be original or on our being of our epoch, but on our remaining ever true to ourselves as artists while modestly and persistently seeking to create the beautiful. Above all American artists should ignore the spirit of the present epoch of Europe. They should imitate it in nothing. If they wish for models, let them go back to Italy and Greece. But, best of all, let them be true to the native idealism and genius of America!

## JOHN LA FARGE

(See Frontispiece and page 209)

**P**ROPHECIES with regard to the rise or fall in public estimation of artists of note are abundantly perilous; yet it is fairly safe to say that the reputation of John La Farge will steadily increase as time permits a closer scrutiny and more mature reckoning of his merits, as time also softens the asperities of those whom the man may have offended by acts, by speech or the printed page.

La Farge was a writer as well as craftsman; he was the foremost leader of a revival of stained glass in America from the low condition it occupies in modern Europe and he was a mural and easel painter of extraordinary merit. In some small measure he had the foible of impatience with those who could not see a point as clearly as he. Not so exuberant, not so boyish in his aversions as James M. Whistler with his amusing intolerance of the men of limited hori-

zons whom he encountered! Perhaps the breed is not so rampant and oppressive in New York and Newport, where La Farge passed the greater part of his life, as it is or was in London. Doubtless the eccentricities of La Farge found a more tolerant and sympathetic *milieu* among his own people than did the virulent Americanism of “Jimmy” Whistler among the staid and stodgy Britons. Yet there was friction here, there was friction . . . even here.

La Farge was born and brought up in New York. He had made several short trips to Europe; he had drawn on wood for engraving a number of very imaginative and original illustrations of the poems of Longfellow, Tennyson and Browning; he had studied the methods of fourteenth century makers of stained glass and had contributed wall paintings and stained glass windows of a rarely original de-